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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest discusses the National History Standards and their implementation in elementary education. The National Standards, along with recent research on history learning, have influenced curriculum guides, textbook revisions, and new instructional materials in various formats. This digest summarizes research on children's ability to learn history and different teaching methods. It explains that the National Standards project divides thinking skills into five categories: (1) chronological thinking; (2) historical comprehension; (3) historical analysis and interpretation; (4) historical research capabilities; and (5) historical issues analysis and decision making. Content standards are divided into three sets: (1) K-grade 4; (2) U.S. history for grades 5-12; and (3) world history for grades 5-12. The set of nine content standards for grades K-4 is divided into five topics: (1) living and working together in families and communities, now and long ago; (2) the history of students' own state or region; (3) the nation; (4) the history of peoples of many cultures around the world; and (5) historic discoveries in science and technology. This digest lists 10 periods or eras in which the 32 content standards in U.S. history are distributed. The 36 content standards in world history are distributed within 8 historical periods. The digest identifies teaching practices that develop historical knowledge, thinking skills, and interest in learning history. Good teaching practices include the use of children's literature, videotapes, and field trips. An 11-item list of references and ERIC resources is included. (DK)

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Achieving History Standards in Elementary Schools

by John D. Hoge

Concern over the quality and quantity of history instruction offered in many U.S. public schools has resulted in National History Standards for grades K-12. The National Standards, along with recent research on history learning, have influenced curriculum guides, textbook revisions, and new instructional materials in various formats.

Research On Children's Ability to Learn History. Children can and do understand historical time in a variety of ways (Downey and Levstik 1991). For example, children are capable of reconstructing patterns and sequences of historical events as they are represented in story-form narratives (Levstik and Pappas 1987). Children's ability to understand cause and effect relationships taking place over time—a basic dimension of historical reasoning—increases throughout childhood and adolescence (Zacarria 1978). By the end of 5th grade, students have acquired a good grasp of historical time terminology, can detect historical anomalies, and show some understanding of time periods in United States history (Hoge 1991). Research-based conclusions about the delayed (late adolescence) development of formal historical thinking ability still stand, though new studies, stimulated by new theories and improved research methodologies, suggest that this ability arises earlier than indicated by older studies (Levstik and Pappas 1992).

Different methods of teaching history produce different history learning outcomes. For example, children taught with a traditional textbook-worksheet-quiz routine learn more names and dates compared to those taught in a topically focused, non-survey approach that employs a variety of instructional materials. However, students in the non-traditional approach develop better insight into the past, better historical reasoning abilities, and more positive attitudes toward the subject (Booth 1980).

Downey and Levstik (1991) conclude that history instruction should (1) begin in the early grades, (2) focus on in-depth, sustained study of significant material rather than shallow coverage, and (3) make use of age-appropriate learning strategies.

National Standards and the Purposes of History Instruction in Elementary Schools. America 2000 set in motion a drive to establish national standards that would guide history instruction. The three-year effort of the National History Standards Project resulted in a detailed plan for teaching historical thinking skills and essential content understandings in grades K-12. The National Standards project divides thinking skills into five categories: (1) Chronological Thinking, (2) Historical Comprehension, (3) Historical Analysis and Interpretation, (4) Historical Research Capabilities, and (5) Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making.

Content standards are divided into three sets: one for kindergarten through grade 4, one for United States history, as it is taught at different levels in grades 5-12, and one for world history, as it is taught at different levels in grades 5-12. The set of nine content standards for grades K-4 is divided into the following five topics: (1) Living and Working Together in Families and Communities, Now and Long Ago, (2) The History of Students' Own State or Region, (3) The Nation, (4) History of Peoples of Many Cultures Around the World, and (5) Historic Discoveries in Science & Technology.

Thirty-two content standards in U.S. history for grades 5-12 are distributed within ten periods or eras: (1) Three Worlds Meet, Beginnings to 1620, (2) Colonization and Settlement, 1585-1763, (3) Revolution and the New Nation, 1754-1820s, (4) Expansion and Reform, 1801-1861, (5) Civil War and Reconstruction, 1850-1877, (6) Development of the Industrial United States, 1870-1900, (7) The Emergence of Modern America, 1890-1930, (8) The Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945, (9) Postwar United States, 1945-early 1970s, and (10) Contemporary United States, 1968-present.

Thirty-six content standards in world history for grades 5-12 are distributed within eight eras or periods: (1) The Beginnings of Human Society, (2) Early Civilizations and the Rise of Pastoral Peoples, 4000-1000 BCE, (3) Classical Traditions, Major Faiths, and Big Empires, 1000 BCE-300 CE, (4) Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounters, 300-1000, (5) Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000-1500, (6) Global Expansion and Encounter, 1450-1770, (7) The Age of Revolutions, 1750-1914, and (8) The Twentieth Century.

Readers of the National History Standards will have little doubt about what content they should teach. In addition, the guide illustrates, with numerous examples, how teachers should address the standards at each of these grade levels: (1) K-4, (2) 5-8, and (3) 9-12. The standards will doubtlessly be used to support curriculum development and related testing efforts.

Teaching of history inspired by the National Standards will help elementary school students achieve important goals of history instruction such as (1) building knowledge of their heritage and cultures of people around the world; (2) developing an understanding of continuity, change, and chronology; and (3) gaining insights into their own lives and contemporary events.

Teaching Practices That Develop Historical Knowledge, Thinking Skills, and Interest. Children's success in history learning is related to the quality and quantity of history instruction provided in the school curriculum. Teachers can meet the National Standards only through systematic implementation of a well-designed curriculum; one that indicates what to teach and how to obtain the support needed to fulfill that responsibility. Beyond the fundamentals of quality curriculum planning and teacher support, there are a number of classroom teaching

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practices that can help students develop competence and interest in the study of history.

Teachers can greatly enhance history instruction by the use of children's literature. There is a substantial supply of elementary-level historical fiction, biographies, and special purpose reference works related to history. Teachers should work with their school media centers and public libraries to identify the titles of books that may be used to invigorate history learning. Such books should be displayed attractively, used frequently, and discussed as a part of the regular classroom routine.

Instruction about the past is aided by the sounds and images of history offered through laserdiscs, videotapes, films, and filmstrips. Although overreliance on these resources is a fault, careful selection and meaningful integration of them with ongoing history instruction can do much to enhance students' knowledge of the past.

Special experiences pump life into children's history learning. Such experiences include field trips to museums and historical sites, historical simulations such as MECC's *Oregon Trail* or Interact's *Discovery 3*, historical craft and model-building experiences, in-depth National History Day projects, and the experience of constructing an oral history of some local "big event." When students are properly prepared for such special history learning experiences, the depth of understanding gained more than justifies the extra effort entailed.

With younger children it is important to begin teaching about history in the familiar contexts of their families, classroom, school, and neighborhood. As students construct familiar histories, ask them to explain—and attempt to justify—the significance of the events they have selected. Make timelines of their histories and help students include funny anecdotes and juicy details that will fuel interest in their stories.

Sources of Additional Information and Ideas. As you experience success in your teaching of history, consider attending a state, regional, or national social studies conference to share your adventures, gain new resources, and learn about other teachers' experiences. Join the National Council for the Social Studies and the National Council for History Education. Subscribe to HistoryLINK, a free Internet "listserv" supported by the National Council for History Education, by sending an e-mail subscription request to **ae515@cleveland.freenet.edu** or call (216) 835-1776.

Information about the National History Standards Project may be obtained from The National Center for History in the Schools, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), 10880 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 761, Los Angeles, CA 90024-4108.

Conclusion. It appears that the traditional roles of history and geography as the leading subjects in elementary social studies will be further strengthened as a result of the development of the National Standards. History has much to offer students who are striving to learn about their world and developing a sense of themselves in it. Skilled teachers can use the strategies discussed here to help their students learn history **and love it!**

References and ERIC Resources. The following list includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia, 22153-2842; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, announced monthly in the CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from the UMI reprint service.

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